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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 000407

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/01/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SNAR](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY'S RULING AK PARTY AND CORRUPTION: AK'S
SOFT UNDERBELLY

REF: A. 2004 ANKARA 7211

[1](#)B. 2005 ANKARA 6543

[1](#)C. 2005 ANKARA 1040

[1](#)D. 2005 ANKARA 6772

Classified by Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, E.O.
12958, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) swept to power in 2002 based in large part on its image as a clean party, but for the past two years, questions about corruption within AKP have hung in the air (refs A and B). AKP has done little to enact promised anti-corruption measures. Senior AKP figures, including PM Erdogan, are dogged by persistent corruption allegations which have gained steam and, for the past week, dominated Turkish media. The allegations have not yet eroded AKP support with the Turkish public, but with AKP's domestic opponents trying to force early elections, we expect more frequent and strident corruption allegations against AKP and increased pressure on AKP to shore up its image as a clean party. End Summary.

Much AKP Talk, Little Action

[1](#)2. (C) In 2002, AKP swept to power by differentiating itself from traditional Turkish politics: it was a clean party. While AKP's official party platform includes a number of anti-corruption measures, so far, AKP has done little to fulfill its promises.

[1](#)3. (C) Soon after coming to power, AKP established an ad hoc parliamentary committee to investigate corruption. The committee's work resulted in high-profile prosecutions against past government figures, including former PM Yilmaz. The committee did not examine current government officials. Nor did it look into any allegations of municipal corruption -- because, according to opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) committee member Kemal Kilicdaroglu (a former bank executive board member), too many AKP figures, including PM Erdogan, had been in municipal government.

[1](#)4. (U) The corruption committee made a number of recommendations, including lifting parliamentary immunity, establishing a permanent parliamentary anti-corruption committee, several constitutional amendments, new anti-corruption legislation, and measures designed to improve

transparency. Although AKP has enjoyed an overwhelming parliamentary majority for over three years, and these are the sort of reforms the EU would also view favorably as evidence of further implementation of rule of law, none has been adopted.

¶5. (C) In early 2005, Energy Minister Guler spearheaded an energy corruption investigation implicating a senior AKP appointee and relatives of AKP MPs (ref C). Early on, Erdogan and ther GOT officials called for a vigorous inestigation, but the appointee has since been released from jail, formed his own energy compan, and the investigation has gone quiet.

¶6. (C) AKP recently took modest steps to clean house at lower levels. Erdogan warned a January 22 gathering of AKP provincial chairs against corruption. When we met with him, Erdogan advisor Omer Celik downplayed this as merely a "routine" admonition; however, one journalist told us privately this indicates how serious corruption within AKP has become. A week later, AKP forced several Mus provincial officials, including an AKP MP's brother, to resign due to corruption.

The Parliamentary Immunity Issue

¶7. (C) The opposition has made much of the AKP's failure to fulfill its pledge to lift MPs' immunity. CHP MP Kilicdaroglu claims there are 80 corruption cases ready to go forward against MPs. True Path Party (DYP) leader Agar (who himself has a checkered past) recently volunteered to be the first to have his immunity lifted.

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¶8. (C) However, AKP's leaders say they will not move on lifting parliamentary immunity without lifting immunity for bureaucrats, judges and the military. AKP leaders worry that the party would be weakened in parliament, the most powerful institution AKP controls. AKP deputy group chair Sadullah Ergin argued to us that lifting only parliament's immunity would upset the "delicate balance" between different branches of government. AKP opponents point out that other institutions do not have formal immunity, but instead, only require permission from an official's superiors to commence a prosecution. And there the immunity issue is stuck.

Turkish Public Patience May Be Wearing Thin

¶9. (U) The average Turk concedes that there may be some AKP corruption, but believes it has not reached the level of prior governments. AKP politicians cite monthly polling indicating AKP's overall support among likely voters is still high. Despite AKP's overall popularity, the Turkish public's patience on the corruption issue may be wearing thin. In a February 2005 poll, asked about the AKP government's anti-corruption performance, 57 percent of respondents said AKP had been successful; by November 2005, the number had dropped to 35 percent.

Finance Minister Unakitan's Son

¶10. (C) Of the high-profile AKP government figures, Finance Minister Unakitan is the most frequent target of corruption allegations. The most prominent allegations involve supposedly fraudulent export invoices filed by Unakitan's son. In November 2005, AKP MPs tried to slip a provision that would have given amnesty to Unakitan's son into a huge omnibus bill. AKP withdrew the provision when opposition MPs discovered it and threatened to block the bill if it were not removed.

¶11. (C) Other allegations involve government tenders awarded

to Unakitan's son; preferential treatment given to his son's factories by municipal authorities; and two villas Unakitan built in violation of zoning ordinances -- ordinances that were later quietly changed. Most recently, critics are denouncing an AKP government-proposed regulation requiring pasteurization of all eggs in the wake of Turkey's avian influenza outbreak -- coincidentally, just after Unakitan's son started up a pasteurized egg business.

¶12. (C) AKP's opponents have repeatedly called for Unakitan's removal, and the frequent allegations have turned him into a political liability. Yet Unakitan has been with Erdogan since Erdogan's days as Istanbul mayor, and Erdogan advisor Egemen Bagis told us recently that calls for Unakitan's removal only make the PM dig in his heels more. Bagis (please protect) worried aloud that "if Unakitan goes down, we (AKP) all go down with him."

PM Erdogan's Wealth: the Bucks Stop Here

¶13. (C) As for the PM, questions about Erdogan's wealth that have dogged him since his days as Istanbul mayor resurfaced in late January. Critics question the origin of Erdogan's interests in food company distributorships, which he sold in February 2005 for \$928,000; the fact that a wealthy businessman footed the educational expenses for the PM's children in the U.S.; exorbitant wedding gifts to his children; and gifts of jewelry to his wife Emine (one of which she returned after public criticism).

¶14. (C) An acting Ankara prosecutor brought charges against Erdogan in May 2002 relating to his acquisition of wealth; the charges were dismissed in January 2003 for lack of evidence. CHP MP Kilicdaroglu claims the real reason for the dismissal was that the AKP government replaced both the investigating prosecutor and the financial expert. Press reports noted that the first financial report prepared in the case claimed Erdogan had great wealth.

¶15. (C) Erdogan has vociferously defended himself but so far

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adamantly refused to disclose details of his personal wealth.

However, the pressure on Erdogan has increased by the day and is causing tension within AKP. In a clear slap at Erdogan, on February 1 three AKP MPs disclosed their financial details: Turhan Comez (a party dissident who denounced corruption in AKP during a December party meeting), Fuat Gecen (a nationalist who has split with AKP leaders on other issues) and Ertugrul Yalcinbayir. A front page story in the February 2 Hurriyet newspaper claimed that Erdogan told his inner circle that he will soon disclose his financial holdings; AKP's vice chair for press relations told us the same day Erdogan would soon make an announcement.

Interior Minister Aksu's Heroin Connections

¶16. (C) Interior Minister Aksu's ties to heroin trafficking are well-enough established that he is ineligible for a U.S. nonimmigrant visa. Aksu is aware of the ineligibility but has neither tried to refute it, nor even asked about it. One well-connected journalist privately attributed Aksu's striking inactivity in the November 2005 Semdinli incident (ref D) allegedly involving misconduct by jandarma (over whom Aksu has jurisdiction) to Aksu's fear that action would trigger scrutiny into his own activities in Turkey's Southeast. There are also widespread rumors that Aksu's son is involved in organized crime.

Transportation Minister Yildirim

¶17. (C) Transportation Minister Yildirim, another Erdogan

insider from Istanbul, has been the target of corruption allegations since his days as Istanbul's Maritime Lines Director. As Minister, Yildirim came under fire after the 2004 crash of the Istanbul-Ankara high speed train that killed over 30 people, including for alleged irregularities involving the company that modified the railway. As with Unakitan, PM Erdogan has resisted calls for Yildirim's removal. Yildirim's son has also been accused of corruption after forming a company with Unakitan's son; the company has received at least one public tender.

Municipal Corruption

¶18. (C) AKP mayors control 149 of Turkey's 3225 municipalities, traditional nodes of corruption. While Istanbul AKP mayor Topbas has not so far been the target of credible corruption allegations, Ankara AKP mayor Gokcek and Adana AKP mayor Durak are persistently and credibly rumored to engage in corrupt practices involving municipal tenders.

¶19. (C) Comment: Corruption is a persistent problem in Turkey; it is something the public has come to expect, which is one reason that AKP may be able to weather the current media spotlight on Unakitan and the PM's reluctance to disclose his finances. Allegations are hardly ever accompanied by hard evidence, and generally come not from prosecutors, but from political opponents with an axe to grind. Persistent corruption allegations also point to another area where Turkey is in need of reform; it is essential for rule of law. It is unrealistic, for example, to expect Turkey's judiciary to live up to standards its most visible public figures do not approach. With AKP's opposition trying to force early elections, we expect increased corruption allegations against AKP, and increased pressure on the party to shore up its clean image, including by enacting appropriate legislation. End Comment.

WILSON